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Address to the Foreign Correspondents Association

Sydney

2 August 2007

STRENGTHENING THE AUSTRALIA-US ALLIANCE

The Labor tradition

Both sides of Australian politics have a history of strong support for the Australia-United States alliance. It is a relationship between the people of our two countries.

In that sense it is an article of faith that the relationship is one that transcends party politics. The administrative power of political parties in our two great democracies is transient. But the relationship between our two people has endured irrespective of which political party holds office.

In 1968, as Leader of the Opposition, Gough Whitlam said:

“For Australia the phrase ‘American Alliance’ covers two things. The formal part of the alliance is our mutual obligation under ANZUS, which, as the Labor platform says, is ‘crucial and must continue’. The other and more important part of the alliance is a matter of spirit and attitude.”¹

If anyone is in any doubt about the significance of the United States to Australia they need only visit war graves of the thousands upon thousands of United States servicemen who died defending our country.

In seeking that assistance Labor Prime Minister John Curtin said in the clearest terms in 1941:

“Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.”²

Labor has supported the alliance for over 65 years. Before, I might add, the Liberal Party even existed.

The significance of our alliance with the United States was recently reaffirmed by Kevin Rudd in the following terms:

“Labor believes that the United States alliance is overwhelmingly in Australia’s strategic interests..... Australia could never replicate by national means the access to global intelligence data we can currently access through the US strategic relationship. The alliance also enhances our strategic interests in the Asia Pacific region in an emerging age of great strategic uncertainty.”³

But more than that, as Whitlam said - and as I will discuss later - the alliance is far deeper than a strategic marriage of convenience. It is a relationship based on genuine affinity and affection between our two people.

The alliance as a pillar

I will focus firstly on the security dimension. The alliance with the United States forms one of the three pillars of Labor’s foreign policy framework. Kevin Rudd outlined in his recent speech to the Global Foundation that:

“Labor believes that we should base our foreign policy on three strong pillars – our alliance with the United States, our membership of the United Nations and a policy of comprehensive engagement with the Asia-Pacific region.”⁴

Those pillars are not separate and distinct they are all important supports upon which our nation's current and future national security interests rest.

The Australia–US alliance is entirely consistent with our engagement in the Asia Pacific region at all levels. From a military perspective the 2000 Defence White Paper outlines:

“For Australia, continued US engagement will support our defence capabilities and play a critical role in maintaining strategic stability in the region as a whole.”⁵

I will subsequently say a little more about Australia's relationship with the United States in terms of our broader political, diplomatic and economic engagement in our region.

As much as and perhaps more than between any other country, the alliance allows Australia access to extensive US intelligence resources, highly critical and sensitive and military technology, preferred status in military equipment purchasing, access to training courses and invaluable combined exercises.⁶

From the US perspective a key part of the alliance are the Joint Facilities because of their unique intelligence gathering, arms control and disarmament verification, and early warning functions.⁷ The joint management and operation of these facilities has its own special benefits.

Indeed, some argue that hosting these installations, and having been prepared to accept the potential strategic risks, remains one of Australia's most meaningful contribution to the alliance.⁸ In his speech to the Lowy

Institute in August 2006, Kim Beazley made the point that during the Cold War:

“The fact that we were a “producer” and not a “consumer” of American security was a major contribution to the western side of the central strategic balance. In short, the Joint Facilities made us the ally the United States needed. That should always be our aspiration.”⁹

In addition to intelligence and military capability our broader interests intersect in our own backyard. The Asia Pacific region is as vital to US strategic and economic interests as it is to Australia.

As mentioned, the three pillars of Labor foreign policy do intersect on a number of levels. For instance, Labor since the Hawke and Keating years has been steadfast in our wish to see the US actively involved in regional dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region – drawing together Labor’s support for the US and our commitment to comprehensive engagement.

This view was fundamental to developing the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in 1989. Since 1993 APEC has been a major contributor to developing a forum for regular discussions between the US President and other regional leaders.

Labor also supported US membership of other forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum – inaugurated in 1994 during the Keating Government’s period in office.¹⁰ ARF is increasingly taking on more and more responsibility in the area of security of counter terrorism, issues of disaster management as well as human security issues. ARF is also developing a capability in early dispute resolution.

The ally the United States needs

Just as no marriage is successful if one party is perpetually submissive - a relationship between two countries must be based on mutual respect and equality of contribution.

In that context I would like to make a few comments about the current conflict in Iraq.

In 1991 the Hawke Government supported military action against Iraq which had been endorsed by the UN Security Council. Labor did not support the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 because it was not endorsed by the UN Security Council. As recent history has proven, the UN Security Council was wise in awaiting a final response from weapons inspectors it had appointed before determining further action.¹¹ It is regrettable that the partners of the world's most famous Texan did not encourage him to hold onto his horses until that final inspection occurred.

Labor's 2003 decision not to support the invasion of Iraq has generated considerable debate. Indeed it has lead to much misinformed comment about a Labor Government's future commitment to the Australia-US alliance.

Labor has long argued that Australia should play a positive role as an ally with an independent point of view and preparedness to put forward sensible advice.

This is done by ensuring that Australia develops its own policy analysis and ideas. In that way we can most effectively contribute to the alliance dialogue. If necessary, at times, we have an obligation to give considered advice to the US which may be contrary to a prevailing view of the incumbent administration in Washington. This point is made strongly by Kim Beazley who said:

"It is vastly more important to be the ally the United States needs than to be the ally any particular American administration might want. Having the self-confidence to be the friend our ally needs is in the long-

*term interest of our security. And ultimately, honest advice on the wisdom of a course of action is what delivers the respect of our friends, because mates talk straight“.*¹²

It is said a good mate always stands by his mate in a flight. But a better mate will counsel his mate before he gets into a losing fight. He will also help him find the way home when the other bloke your mate has stepped in to help is exploiting his assistance and prolonging the conflict. An Australian Labor Government will be that better mate.

It is quite likely that the situation in Iraq today would be different if in 2003 Prime Minister Howard had spoken up to our close ally, as a mate. Indeed there is every possibility that the political fortunes of the two men may have been different if words of caution had been issued by our Prime Minister.

But at the end of the day, as interesting as personal reflection can be, our alliance is not a relationship between two men. It is an enduring relationship between two people – the people of Australia and the United States.

Labor's view of the Iraq conflict is in fact in line with many senior American political figures, from both sides of politics. These leaders have spoken out about the ongoing failure in Iraq and the need to change course. Conversely Mr Howard's open ended Iraq policy is now offside with at least 11 US Presidential candidates, some 270 Democrat members of the US Congress, some 23 Republican members of Congress and the vast majority of the citizens of America. Furthermore, a May US opinion poll showed that the majority of Americans favour a timetable for withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.¹³

Opinion polls should not determine policy but common sense should. The vast majority of American's and Australian's are down to earth people of common sense.

Labor is not calling for a precipitous overnight withdrawal and we are certainly not leaving our American mates in the lurch. What we will do is consult heavily with our allies about withdrawing the 550 Australian combat troops who are currently deployed in the south of Iraq. That is the Battle Group which has already handed over security control to the Iraqis some 12 months ago. We will not hesitate to deploy a second troop rotation into mid-2008 if required and we will carefully coordinate the withdrawal of the 550 combat troops with the military planning of our allies.

Our frigate in the Persian Gulf, our Orion surveillance aircraft, our Hercules transport aircraft and our 110 strong Security Detachment in Baghdad will stay to assist our allies in Iraq. In addition we will provide economic assistance and expertise in border security. We will also contribute to vigorous diplomatic efforts to draw the international community – including Arab states to finding a political solution to the disaster that is Iraq.

In short we will be steadfast mates with eyes always on reality. Our friendship will focus on solutions not just to symbolism.

The broader significance of our alliance

I would now like to focus on the broader significance of our relationship with the United States. Briefly returning to the second part of Gough Whitlam's statement: "the other and more important part of the alliance" which he described as "*spirit and attitude*".¹⁴

In February this year US Vice President Dick Cheney addressed an audience in Sydney at which I was present. After acknowledging the Prime Minister - an old friend of his, he then expressed his delight to see another old friend – Kim Beazley. Both had shared time together as Secretary of Defense and Defence Minister respectively.

The Vice President went on to say:

“Your country and mine are filled with people who speak plainly and honestly. And surely that's one of the reasons we're natural friends. When Americans think of Australia, we think of a place with a pioneering spirit much like our own. We think of a country that shares our founding commitments to liberty and to equality, and to our traditions of justice and tolerance. We think, above all, of the character of the Australian people -- self-reliant, practical, and good-hearted”¹⁵

It is this strong base of shared spirit and attitude, which will ensure that the relationship can and will endure. It is what our strong relationship allows, and indeed requires.

Our relationship was recently described by US Ambassador Robert McCallum as “multi-faceted”, “extraordinarily broad” and “extraordinarily deep”¹⁶. This strength and depth Labor believes allows us to move forward from Iraq, and to focus head-on upon the range of other challenges that we share.

Enhancing the alliance by Australia carrying a greater share of the peace and capacity building responsibilities in the Asia Pacific

Labor firmly believes that the alliance between Australia and the US can be greatly enhanced by Australia carrying a greater share of the peace and capacity building responsibilities in the Asia Pacific region.

Our region is a place of risks and many complexities. There are challenges of development, economic growth and international security. There are difficult questions about how to rebuild fragile and weak states that have suffered conflict, community upheaval and a breakdown in the rule of law.

The long term intention must obviously be to resolve conflict and to prevent future conflict from occurring. Australians are well aware of the security challenges in our backyard. We are reminded that we live in a fragile and potentially dangerous neighbourhood by multiple military deployments in East

Timor and the Solomon Islands, issues of law and order in PNG, unrest in Tonga and Vanuatu and by last year's military coup in Fiji.

Failure to address our regional responsibilities risks placing an enormous burden on our nation.

The United States is already heavily engaged in our region. But there is absolutely no doubt they would welcome a greater Australian contribution to building regional security and governance capacity in our own arc of responsibility.

The work of the United States in our region is outstanding. It is regrettable that the value of that work and its significance for regional stability is so undervalued. I want to take some time to point out a few facts.

Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization

The US has created the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, with the mission statement to:

“lead, coordinate and institutionalise the US Government civilian capacity to prevent or prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilise and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict or civil strife, so they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy and a market economy.”¹⁷

It was my pleasure earlier this year to travel the US, and indeed I visited a number of very impressive agencies and organisations whose task it is to address a range of challenges across the Asia Pacific region.

Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance

In relation to disaster relief and issues of human security the Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE) is

invaluable. The centre promotes civil and military cooperation to reduce devastation and human suffering caused by disasters – man made and natural. It does this by developing inter-agency as well as international co-ordination. The Centre provides education, training and research assistance in respect to responding events such as the Asian Tsunami and in working to prevent human security crises such as an outbreak of avian influenza.

The COE has a network of experienced staff of international humanitarian and peace support operations practitioners. The Centre emphasizes the importance of developing and maintaining a strong international network of skilled people with the deployable capabilities.

While it is all too common to hear a criticism of the United States for taking unilateral action, a key success of the Centre for Excellence has been its ability to develop relationships with a number of international bodies.

Relationships have been established with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, International Committee of the Red Cross, Centres for Disease Control, East West Centre, the United Nations Department of Peace Keeping Operation, US Aid, the World Health Organisation, ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, the University of Hawaii and World Vision International.¹⁸

The major focus areas of COE are:

- To undertake stability operations following natural and humanitarian disasters;
- To assist in responding to complex emergencies;
- To undertake humanitarian assistance;
- To undertake disaster relief;
- To provide peace support operations following civil disorder;
- To provide research and developmental assistance in respect to civil-military response planning;

- To assist in developing medical and public health response in respect to national and international challenges including HIV Aids mitigation and possible pandemics.

The emphasis of COE has been on promoting co-operation between military and state civil defence agencies to develop greater synchronization of planning, training and exercises.

The COE also conducts analysis of disaster response to focus on lessons learnt and the development of best practices. In particular it provided a dispassionate and helpful analysis of inadequacies in the response of the International community, including United States Agencies to the Asian Tsunami Crisis.

There are a number of units within the COE.

The Civil Military Relations Unit which promotes an understanding of the roles and advantages of military and civilian entities cooperating to provide humanitarian assistance in crisis, supporting transitions to stability and providing security support during that phase.

The Humanitarian Affairs unit provides expertise on the conduct of civilian humanitarian operations. It has access to an extended network of experience humanitarian practitioners around the globe. It focuses on developing education and training resources available to the international humanitarian community.

The COE also has a specific Pacific Disaster Management Information Network which produces a number of information products covering natural and man made disasters including those arising from conflicts and humanitarian emergencies particularly in the Asia Pacific region.

The Medical and Public Health Unit of COE focuses on developing innovative ways to support the medical planning activities in meeting complex medical challenges.

Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-W)

Up to 90 percent of the world's methamphetamine seizures and two thirds of the world's methamphetamine abusers are found in the Asia Pacific region. In fact criminal organisations in China and India are among the world's top 10 chemical producing nations and produce the majority of the world's ephedrine. The opium trade of Afghanistan is estimated by the United Nations to be in the vicinity of US\$3.2 billion annually.

Trans-national criminal organisations are powerful and exploit weak security environments. In turn those criminal groups undermine stability of countries in our region.

It is an understatement to say that counter narcotics strategies are vitally important for our regional security.

In that context I have now visited the JIATF-West on two separate occasions. The mission of JIATF-W is to conduct activities to detect, disrupt and dismantle drug related translational threats in Asia and the Pacific.

The reference to Interagency includes; the US Navy, Navy Reserve, FBI, United States Coast Guard, United States Army, United States Air Force, United States Air Force Reserve, United States Marines, United States Marine Reserves.

In short JIATF-W has access to and co-ordinates the activities of the all of substantial United States military, policing and intelligence agencies.

The goals of JAIF-W are to:

- Reduce drug flow throughout South East Asia and the Pacific;

- Disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations;
- Strengthen the law enforcement institutions of partner nations threatened by illegal drugs; and
- Reduce support the drug trafficking provides to terrorist organizations;

JAITF-W operates a number of counter-narcotics missions, and training and infrastructure programmes with a number of regional partners including the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Given the agencies involved and the tremendous importance of the work of JIATF-W, I was therefore very disappointed to learn that a representative of the Australian Federal Police has not been posted to the Agency. I was informed that an AFP Representative would be most welcome. I do understand however that a representative of the Australian Customs Service will be based with JIATF-W later this year.

By working more closely with the JIATF-W we are more likely to overcome our joint challenges including:

- Transforming organisational structures that hinder cooperation;
- Overcoming competition and distrust amongst agencies; and
- Eliminating cracks and seams that provide safe haven for international criminal syndicates.

Labor is determined to support the important role of JIATF-W and will permanently place an AFP representative to assist the work of the Agency. A permanent AFP representative will facilitate even closer co-ordination with the work of the Agency and Australian law enforcement Agencies.

East-West Centre

The East West Centre was created by the United States Congress to:

"To contribute to a peaceful, prosperous and just Asia Pacific community by serving as a vigorous hub for cooperative research, education, and dialogue on critical issues of common concern the Asia Pacific region."

The East West Centre plays an important role in strengthening regional cooperation by advising, promoting and supporting regional institutions - government and non-government. It offers a number of general and specialist education programmes as well as providing a number of scholarships to potential leaders in the Asia Pacific region.

The East West Centre also engages in conflict management and mediation. The Centre provides training and fellowship opportunities, and works to improve understanding of the origins and course of conflicts and the means to avoid, manage, and peacefully resolve them.

The Asia Pacific Leadership Program operates by inviting young leaders and potential leaders from the Asia Pacific region to undertake course work at the Centre. The course work includes a leadership program that focuses on instructing students as to how to build networks within their own communities to maximize their effectiveness.

The East West Centre also undertakes a number of exchanges and conferences including regular seminars including for overseas journalists.

Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies

The Asia Pacific Centre for Security Studies was established as a US Department of Defense Regional Study, Conference and Research Centre. Despite its close connection with the United States military I have sat in on round table discussions indicating that staff members had complete academic freedom and did not hesitate to contribute a wide range of views.

The Centre has the goal of developing cooperative strategy and maintaining a positive security relationship with nations from the Asia Pacific region.

The focus of the Centre is on academic non-war fighting analysis, discussion and training. Forty-five Asia Pacific regional governments have been - and continue to be - involved in the programs of the Centre.

Programmes of the APCSS focus on the inter-relationship between military, economic, political and diplomatic policies and participants relevant to regional security issues.

The Centre also undertakes a number of regional events and has been able to conduct roundtable workshops to find solutions to complex issues including in some circumstances recommending restructuring of government agencies. I was advised that a number of countries have acted in whole or in part on recommendations of the APCSS.

Again it was suggested to me that an Australian would be most welcome as a permanent member of staff. It was suggested that not only would that person be able to provide particular expertise from Australia's perspective but would also share in the expertise contributed by other countries. It was also suggested that that person would have an excellent opportunity to develop networks with senior representatives of other countries who have and will continue to have a vital role in security in our region.

Again, Labor will provide a permanent military staff officer to the APCSS to work more closely with the United States in the important work of security capacity building in our region.

Global Peace Operations Initiative

Another very positive influence in the region is the Global Peace Operations Initiative. The issue was discussed at length during my visit to US Pacific Command and indeed during meetings in Washington.

The Global Peace Operations Initiative includes a fund established by the United States Congress to assist in the training of peace keepers around the globe. The initiative aims to develop the capacity of various militaries around the world to undertake peace keeping and stability operations.¹⁹

The ADF Liaison Officer with the US State Department recently submitted to the United States Department of State that more advanced militaries such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore and others would be able to significantly value add to the program by offering their expertise to train militaries in other less resourced nations.

The Global Peace Operations Initiative unquestionably has significant potential benefit for Australia and our region.

Conclusion

It is clear that the US plays a vital role in the Asia Pacific. The examples I have given demonstrate the extensive commitment that our American friends have to our region.

In this century, which some refer to as the 'Asian Century', is vital that we work closely with the United States to ensure strong institutions and frameworks to face our mutual challenges. These challenges include managing the economic and military rise of both China and India, the challenges of fragile and failing states, and the fight against international terrorism.

I have previously put forward the idea of an Asia Pacific Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation which would work to develop joint doctrine and training between Australian Government departments, NGOs and the private sector. It would also provide an opportunity for participants from regional partners to learn governance skills and become a hub for academic discussion and policy development.

This Centre would work closely with the United States agencies and institutes that I have referred to. Jointly we would work to partner institutions in the Asia Pacific region to enhance the solid network of governance and peace building training across our region. Indeed, the Australian Centre would also be a welcome addition to the infrastructure needed for our effective contribution to the Global Peace Operations Initiative.

I have also announced that a Labor Government will take a proposal to the next Trilateral Strategic Dialogue with our Japanese and American partners to commission a Trilateral Climate Change and National Security Assessment.

The Assessment would identify the major regional security threats raised by global warming. Security agencies from all three countries would participate and the initiative would involve close consultation with countries in the region most exposed to the security risks of global warming.

Labor is committed to working more closely with those United States institutions that are vital to our region. This will include permanently basing a permanent AFP representative to help the JIATF-W fight the narcotics trade: a trade that funds terrorist organisations in our region. Labor will also include placing a permanent military staff officer with the APCSS.

Far from downgrading the Australia-United States alliance a future Labor Government will work more closely with the United States in the vitally important work that they do in our region.

By doing so we will add greater value to achieving our combined objectives.

[ends]

ENDNOTES

¹ Whitlam, E.G., *Beyond Vietnam*, Victorian Fabian Society, Melbourne, 1968, p.21.

² Norman Harper (ed.), *Australia and the United States*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1971, pp. 135-39, includes the full text and a reproduction of the Melbourne *Herald* article of 27 December 1941.

³ Kevin Rudd, 'Smart power', *The Diplomat*, February-March 2007, p. 21.

⁴ Kevin Rudd, 'Leading not Following: Australia's place in the emerging international order', speech to the Global Foundation, 8 March 2007

⁵ <http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/docs/WPAPER.PDF>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, p 35

⁸ Desmond Ball, 'The US-Australian Alliance: History and Prospects', Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Working Paper No. 330, ANU, 1999, 08

⁹ Leader of the Opposition Kim C. Beazley MP, *Beyond Iraq*, Address to the Lowy Institute, Sydney, 10 August 2006, p. 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., p 35

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¹³ <http://www.gallupoll.com/content/?ci=27724>

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¹⁷ <http://www.state.gov/s/crs/>

¹⁸ <http://coe.dmha.org>

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